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HISTORY AS A SCIENCE

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HISTORY AS A SCIENCE

HISTORY in the abstract has been defined as "the recorded events of the past"; and in the concrete as "a narrative, oral or written, of past events". History in action, so to speak, has been defined as "that branch of science which is occupied with ascertaining and recording the facts of the past". These definitions are mere skeletons and do not convey an idea of the subject in its fullness as an ethical and civilizing force. Indeed it would be difficult to do this within the limitation of definitions. Figure of speech does better, but even figure of speech is lame at it. History is the clearing-house of reputations of men and nations, in which time adjusts matters, cutting down what some have received too much and building up what others have received too little. It is the mirror in which man can see the solution of the problems of his day if he will look into it through the plane of truth and not through the concavity of his prejudices or the convexity of his predilections. It is the Alma Mater of civilization in which each generation has been a pupil and could obtain an assay of the value of human endeavor for human happiness. It is the doomsday book of man's use and abuse of God's revelations. It is a panorama of the emancipation of man from the thralldom of man's lust and greed through the merciful teachings of Christ and the taming influence of His sweet yoke. It is the wise counsellor of the statesman and the kind mentor of the churchman. It is the star-lit heavens of the past from which the luminaries of each age reflect back to us the light of their noble deeds for our guidance and encouragement.

Even in the abstract, history as the "recorded events of

the past " gives but a dim outline of history as a science. The events of the past have little meaning when they stand each alone, when they stand in disorder, or when they stand with lacunae of missing events in between. To tell their story they must stand together in logical order and completeness. Above all, spurious events must be kept out of the mosaic. The picture of each age must hang in the light of its own age. When thus put together and hung, the events of each age have a message for the living age which, correctly interpreted and properly received, is helpful and consoling. Events themselves are cold things when standing apart from the aspirations, hopes, fears, desires, and passions which have produced them. History as a science must show the events in their human coloring. Man innately is a religious being and is influenced in his conduct by his knowledge of and acceptance or rejection of divine revelation. Every event must show its coefficient of religion for historical value. Man individually and collectively has a destiny presided over by an all-seeing Providence. Events, the products of man's activities, only tell their full story when seen in the light of that Providential supervision. History as a science then must be a complete story of man in preceding ages as he stood and acted in the drama of God's creation for the benefit of those who are now on the stage of life. This is history in the abstract.

History in the concrete, to be scientific, too must be more than a mere narrative of events. It must be an analysis, an understanding and an appreciation of them, with human interest, for the ethical benefit of the living age. There must be a motive for every rational act, and no motive is worthy of man which is not for the good of humanity. History therefore must be truthful, ethical, and useful. Without these qualities, to say the least, it is not worth while. It may serve the sordid purpose of the individual; it may gratify the vanity of partisans, and for the moment it may mislead the living age, but ultimately it will be valued at

its worth. Cardinal Newman has well said: "History is a record of facts; and facts according to the proverb are stubborn things. Ingenious men may misrepresent them for awhile, but in the end they will be duly ascertained and appreciated." The Bible is our best model of what history should be. It tells the good deeds and the evil deeds of men for the good of the one who reads the story. It does not respect persons, but neither does it vilify any one. It recognizes the relationship between God and man, and the relationship between man and man, and it measures every event by the standard of that relationship. It values human agencies in the designs of Providence without regard to knowledge, intention and responsibilities of the agents. A good intention cannot neutralize the evil of ignorance, nor can knowledge justify an evil purpose. Action in duress may work evil without culpability of the agent. The desires of a man's heart shine through his most cunning deed. In no other place than the Bible do we find the value of human events for human happiness in the designs of Providence so accurately measured and so clearly depicted. In analysis, in understanding and in appreciation of events, the Bible in those parts in which it is historical shows us what concrete history, as a finished scientific product, should be. True, it is the inspired word alongside of which the work of the most capable man will be defective; but it may well be taken as the model for man's endeavor.

- History in the concrete as the world now has it for the most part is defective. Some of it has been born of bias and prejudice; some of it is the product of unequipped men; and most of it is based on insufficient and incomplete data. Commerce, politics, and religion are the three potent factors which have distorted and corrupted history. Commerce always has and now is playing its part in the prostitution of history in a cold unsentimental way. Greed and lust are the underlying incentives. Men entrenched behind ill-gotten, established privileges, or engaged in intrigue for

them, do not permit truth to stand in the way of holding or attaining them. They live in the present and carefully cover their tracks of wrongdoing. Publicly they often parade in the disguise of philanthropists. Sometimes they use good self-sacrificing men, and grand beneficent projects as stalking-horses to cover up their designs. When historical data are mixed with commercial data one must scrutinize them closely and analyze them carefully to get their true historical value. Politics is very much like commerce in its manner of polluting history, but is governed more by lust of power than by lust of possession. It too is secretive and double-dealing in its methods and will sacrifice truth to success. Wherever it touches elbows with history one needs to be on his guard. Religion is the most honest but also the most illusive, misleading factor in history. It befogs the minds of men through its effect upon the heart. Since religion is the most sacred thing in men's lives, it is not to be wondered at that it subconsciously biases their minds in favor of the doctrines and principles which each one individually professes. Suppression and misinterpretation are the chief factors in falsification. Neither is necessarily inspired by bad motives; in a matter of fact both most frequently are begotten of good motives. But whilst they may perhaps be defended ethically, they cannot be defended historically. In the words quoted by Pope Leo XIII in his famous Encyclical Letter of 1883, "The first law of history is to dread uttering falsehood; the next not to fear stating the truth; lastly, that the historian's writings should be open to no suspicion of partiality or of animosity".

More vitiating still is the partisan spirit, the intolerance and the persecution engendered by commerce, politics, and religion. As they have their seat and action in large bodies of people, it is extremely difficult to detect, analyze and estimate their influence upon events. Where they exist there is action and reaction and the mind easily becomes confused in the jungle of events which have grown out of

them. Good motives and bad acts, bad motives and good acts, the deeds of the innocent and the deeds of the guilty, acts of necessity and acts of design, what the leader has done and what the follower has done, what one has inspired and what another has executed, stand so close together and are so intertwined that it is difficult to pick out the material for the house of history which is sound and true in all its parts. Besides, such influences extend over so long a period of time that only after centuries is one far enough removed from them to be untouched by them, and even then one may not altogether escape the waves of secondary influences which they may have begotten. It is only by stages through the labors of many that the truth is finally sifted out and put together.

Out of the misdeeds of men done in the name of commerce, politics, and religion have arisen widespread, far-reaching forces, long inchoant, only relatively recently full grown, which like a biting acid blur the truth in events beyond recognition. These are Socialism, Sovietism, and irreligion. For the most part they are negations, and as such are destructive of Christian civilization, elusive of detection. Fetishes, they inspire radical action by underground methods and insidious propagandism which reach even those who try to resist them. They are the poison in literature which has made the world sick. They have crept into concrete history of more recent making, and will not easily be kept out of what is yet to come. What they already have done to the minds of the people is responsible for the social upheavals through which the world has recently gone and is still going.

Perhaps no one in the last century so clearly foresaw the destructive influences of these forces as the venerable Pope Leo XIII, who was led by his prevision to write his Encyclical Letter on History to Cardinals Antoine de Luca, Vice-chancellor of the Holy Roman Church, John Baptist Pitra, Librarian of the Holy Roman Church, and Joseph

Hergenroether, Prefect of the Vatican Archives, in 1883. What the Holy Father said in this letter was mostly for Italians, but much of it was applicable to the people of the entire world. "Often indeed," were some of his words, "children have manuals put into their hands for instruction thickly sown with falsehood, and when they become accustomed to these, especially if the perversity and heedlessness of the teacher countenance it, the young students are easily turned against venerable antiquity, and imbued with an irreverent scorn of things and men most holy. On leaving the elementary classes, they are frequently exposed to a danger even greater; for in the higher studies, from the narrative of facts they rise to the examination of causes; and from these causes they endeavor to deduce laws issuing in rash theories, often in flat contradiction to divine revelation, and with no other motive than that of glossing over or concealing the salutary influence which Christian institutions have had on the course of human destinies and the progress of events. . . . It is indeed hard to conceive how much harm may be done by the subservience of history to party ends and to the ambition of individuals. For it becomes, not the guide of life, nor the light of truth, as the ancients have rightly declared it ought to be, but the accomplice of vice, and the agent of corruption, especially for the young, whose minds it will fill with unsound opinions, and whose hearts it will turn away from virtue and modesty. . . . Let bare assertions be replaced by the fruits of painful and patient research, judgments rashly made by the outcome of serious study, and frivolous opinions by the criticism of wisdom. Strenuous efforts should be made to refute all falsehoods and untrue statements by ascending to the fountain-heads of information. . . . Arbitrary opinion must necessarily give way before solid arguments; truth in spite of persevering opposition must triumph in the end; it may be darkened for the moment; never can it be extinguished." What he wanted Catholics to do in the

matter is well set forth in these words: "If the Church then has always deserved well of history, let her again do so to-day, when the very state of the times in which we live constrains to that duty."

But it is history as a science in action which most concerns the members of the organization which I have the honor to address. Indeed it was this which constituted the purpose of the Holy Father's Encyclical Letter. It was this which made the Holy Father's words stimulate the organization of Catholic Historical Societies in many parts of the world; and it was this which brought into existence the American Catholic Historical Association. Probably too history as a science in action means more to Catholics than to others, because for four hundred years Catholics have been misrepresented by false methods of writing history and thus have been made the victims of burdensome oppression and humiliating caricature.

Intrinsically, history ranks with mathematics, medicine, and law in the fellowship of the sciences; but in development as a servant of mankind it has not kept pace with them. An explanation of this may be found in man's selfish nature and intellectual limitations. The value of history in the pursuit of happiness is equal to that of any of the other three, but the manner in which one can get that value is different. It comes to one as part of the whole mass of people in better government, better churchmanship, better society, and not as an individual, in more comfort, more pleasure, and more opportunity for self-advancement. Moreover the science of history does not lead to individual emolument, nor does its pursuit give a profitable avocation. It cannot even be followed successfully by an individual without the help of others. In its nature it is the work of many. One man may put the grain in the bin, but many must garner the sheaves, thresh it from the straw and winnow out the chaff. It requires talent, patience, devotion, and a spirit of self-sacrifice, in the one who pursues it; enlighten-

ment and understanding in those who encourage him. Its development in an age and in a people really is a fair criterion of the civilization of that age and people.

Since the masses are the beneficiaries of history, the masses should carry the burdens of its making. There are few who can be historians; there are not many who even can be assistant historians; but every educated intelligent man and woman can be a helper; and even the humblest person can contribute his mite. For history in action or organization is essential. Its field is in societies, colleges, and universities. In societies congenial spirits meet, create an historical atmosphere, and help each other. Societies also attract those who cannot themselves produce history, nor even assist those who can produce it, but are interested and willing to hold up the hands of those who can. Colleges and universities have an intellectual atmosphere in which historians can live and prosper. They should maintain and develop at least one such person and attach him by membership to at least one historical society. The rank and file of the people can contribute their mites by helping to maintain chairs of history in colleges and universities. History can never become a lucrative pursuit, but it may be made attractive by the universal esteem and respect in which it may come to be held.

Since 1883 there has been an awakening of the American people to the importance of history as an asset in our civilization. In part this has been due to the Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, and in part to progress in education and public enlightenment. Catholics perhaps have not responded to the Holy Father's appealing letter as well as they should, but they have done much. Ten Catholic Historical Societies have been organized, eight Catholic Historical Publications have been established, and two Catholic Historical Libraries have been founded in the United States. Besides this, a chair of history has been founded in the Catholic University of America and professorships of history either

have been added to the curriculum or have been made more important in many of our Catholic educational institutions. There is reason to hope that ere long every large centre of population in the United States will have a well organized Catholic Historical Society; every Catholic University will have its endowed chair of history; and every Catholic educational institution its professorship of history. To bring about these things is part of the duty, as I view it, of the American Catholic Historical Association.

For history as a science in action the Rt. Rev. Cuthbert Butler, O.S.B., of Downside Abbey, England, has thrown out a good idea in his recent book. He recommends that scientific study and scientific production of history be made one of the "works" laid down in the rule of Benedictine monasteries of our day. He advocates setting aside members of the community who have the "aptitude for it", who can do "laborious study and comparison of original sources, the Fathers, the early authorities—working among archives and records, transcribing documents, collating manuscripts, all of it painful, exacting, unexciting work," for this purpose and counting it the "work" of the rule for them, keeping them at it for life. He speaks of Cardinal Rampolla, than whom "probably no one in our day has had a wider outlook on the needs of religion and the Church," as in favor of this. "His parting words to me in 1913," says Abbot Butler, "were an exhortation to use all my influence for the promotion of good historical studies among my monks". This idea might well be extended to all Catholic monasteries and religious houses and modified to suit their rule and mode of life. There is no field in which men who wish to retire from the world can do more for the Church and for humanity than in the field of history, for it is in this field civilization will have to seek the balm of Gilead for the sores with which it now is afflicted.

The American Catholic Historical Association has come into existence at a time when the world is ripe for it and

merely needs to do each task which falls within its easily discernible, well defined field of labor, promptly as it comes along, to accomplish all that its most ardent friends can expect of it. Under the friendly patronage of the Catholic University of America, which it has without stint, it can get the hearty support of Catholic men and women and of Catholic educational institutions from all parts of the United States, for the asking, if it will but place a well constructed scientific programme before them. The programme must be worthy of the cause, however, and of the people before whom it is placed. It must take in, not only history in the making for America, but history in the remaking for the world, for all that time in which history has been a conspiracy against the truth. For four hundred years history has been built upon bias, prejudice, greed, and false philosophy. To show up falsehood in what has been written, and give the world the truth in its place, ought to be, and surely would be an appealing task for our Catholic American people. To lead in this work and find the ways and means of doing it clearly is one of the functions of this organization. What the Catholic Church has done for our country and what Catholics as individuals and as a body have contributed to the development of our free institutions and the formation of the character of our people has never been woven into our history or our literature. To have this done likewise is one of the functions of this organization. Historic truth should be written into our school books, not only the school books of Catholic children but the school books of all children. Falsehood here is a deadly poison to our free institutions. Surely it is the function of this Society to prevent insidious implantation of error in the minds of the young and to supply historic truth for their intellectual food.

How shall the functions of our organization be performed? It takes money and men, women too, for such a programme. All of these are available, but they must be sought for in our large prosperous Catholic population.

The first step is to get up a membership large and strong enough to give an adequate income for the work. Every Catholic educational institution of our country ought to be, can be and will be a member of our society when the reasons for it are presented. Many members of the Catholic Hierarchy already are members and probably all will be when the facts have been laid before them. Many clergymen and many laymen have joined our ranks, and many thousands of them would join if they understood the objects of the association and were confronted with a programme which would appeal to them as worthy of their coöperation. The next step, when an income which would warrant it has been attained, is to place archivists in the libraries of Europe and America in which there are documents that have a bearing upon the work to be done. This preliminary work is necessary to get at the facts, not only for rewriting general history, but for writing the history of our own country. What Catholics have done in the development of America has not got into our histories for the most part because the documents which set forth much of it that is worth while, lie hidden in the archives of Europe. The work of the Catholic missionaries who undoubtedly did much to shape the moral destiny of our country and to form the character of our people, still lies hidden from the world in the archives of Europe. The Catholic immigrant brought with him Catholic principles which he poured into the melting-pot of customs and habits of the people with whom he associated in his new home even when he lost his Faith for lack of opportunity to practise his religion. The data upon which this could be essayed are not now available but could be got with painstaking effort. What Catholics did who kept their Faith and what Catholics did who lost it—these are unknown quantities still in the development of our country, because no one has taken the trouble to work them out. Both of these questions are of interest in the study of the character and habits of our people. The influence of such men as Arch-

bishop Carroll, John Carroll of Carrollton, Fitzimons, Galitzin, Cheverus, Farmer, Barry, Meade, Helbron, Wimmer, O'Conway, and thousands of others, prelates, clergy and laymen, upon the development of American character and the formation of American customs and habits, even through non-Catholics, in the very nature of things, must have been an important factor. All of this should be woven into our history.

In conclusion I wish to express my appreciation of the honor which has been conferred upon me in making me the first President of this organization. I will try to make myself worthy by devoting some of the energy of my declining years to help carry out the programme which I have outlined.

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